

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1679

INFO CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 21995

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, TH

SUBJ: DEMOCRATS SUFFER FIRST MAJOR DEFEAT

SUMMARY. THE DEMOCRATS SUFFERED FIRST MAJOR DEFEAT WHEN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ON JUL 29 VOTED DOWN CABINET-APPROVED NOMINATIONS TO THE ANTI-CORRUPTION COMMITTEE. WITH FEW EXCEPTIONS THE DEMOCRATS' COALITION PARTNERS VOTED AGAINST NOMINATIONS OR ABSTAINED. GOVERNMENT MP'S VOTED AGAINST NOMINATIONS BECAUSE OF INADEQUATE CONSULTATION AND CONSIDERATION OF COALITION PARTNER'S VIEWS. LEADERS OF THREE COALITION PARTIES DISMISSED DEFEAT AS MINOR ISSUE AND PLEDGED SUPPORT FOR BUDGET BILL. DEMOCRATS HELD EMERGENCY MEETING JUL 30 BUT DECIDED AGAINST DISSOLUTION OF PARLIAMENT, RESIGNATION OF GOVERNMENT OF CABINET RESHUFFLE. GOVERNMENT HOUSE SPOKESMAN AND SECRETARY TO INTERIOR MINISTER RESIGNED IN PROTEST. DEFEAT FURTHER TARNISHES ALREADY POOR LEADERSHIP IMAGE OF DEMOCRATS. END SUMMARY.

1. IN A CLOSED SESSION ON JUL 29 THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES VOTED DOWN THE GOVERNMENT NOMINEES TO THE ANTI-CORRUPTION COMMITTEE (ACC).

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THE VOTE WAS 116 FOR AND 124 AGAINST CONFIRMATION OF THE NOMINATIONS, WHICH HAD BEEN APPROVED BY THE CABINET ON JUL 12.

2. WITH A FEW EXCEPTIONS MP'S OF THE DEMOCRATS' THREE COALITION PARTNERS VOTED AGAINST THE BILL OR ABSTAINED. ACCORDING TO DEMOCRAT MP SINGTO CHANGTRAKUN, ALL THAI NATION PARTY (TNP) CABINET MEMBERS, INCLUDING PARTY LEADER PRAMAN ADIREKSAN, ABSTAINED WHILE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE PARTY (SJP) SECRETARY 6-GENERAL THAWIT KLINPRATHUM VOTED AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT. DESCENDED ONTO THE HOUSE FLOOR TO ORDER HIS SJP FOLLOWERS TO VOTE AGAINST THE APPOINTMENTS. IRONICALLY, THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF THAILAND MP'S AND THE SOLE SOCIALIST UNITED FRONT MP VOTED WITH THE DEMOCRATS AS DID THE TWO PROVINCIAL DEVELOPMENT PARTY MP'S.

3. ACCORDING TO SJP MP SAMAN CHOMPHUTHEP, THAWIT VKTED AGAINST THE NOMINATIONS BECAUSE HE FELT PRIME MINISTER MR. SENI PRAMOT HAD GONE BACK ON HIS WORD. BEFORE CABINET APPROVAL OF THE NIMINATIONS THAWIT HAD OBJECTED TO CERTAIN NOMINEES. HE HAD ASKED SENI FOR MORE TIME TO CONSIDER NOMINATIONS AND THOUGHT SENI HAD AGREED TO DO SO. TNP MP'S ALSO FELT THAT THERE WAS LACK OF CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION ON THIS AND OTHER MATTERS. THEY WERE IRKED, FOR EXAMPLE, AT THE LAW-SUIT FILED BY LOSING DEMOCRAT CANDIDATES IN PHRAE TO OVERTURN THE RESULTS OF THE LAST ELECTION IN WHICH THREE TNP MP'S WON SEATS AND AT THE DECISION PUSHED THROUGH AT DEMOCRAT INSISTENCE TO CUT THE MIDDLEMAN OUT OF THE LONGAN TRADE.

4. THE LEADERS OF THE THREE CONSERVATIVE COALITION PARTIES PUBLICLY TREATED THE ACC VOTE AS OF SMALL SIGNIFICANCE. THEY TOLD THE PRESS THAT THIS VOTE WILL HAVE NO EFFECT ON THE BUDGET BILL, WHICH WILL BE TABLED IN PARLIAMENT ON AUG 5. SENI LATER TOLD THE PRESS THAT THESE LEADERS HAD GIVEN HIM A FIRM PLEDGE THAT THEIR PARTNERS WOULD VOTE EN MASSE FOR THE BUDGET BILL.

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5. THE DEMOCRAT MP'S HELD AN EMERGENCY MEETING THE MORNING OF JUL 30 TO DISCUSS THE DEFEAT. THEY WERE ESPECIALLY FURIOUS AT THAWIT, AND THERE WAS STRONG SENTIMENT FOR THE OUSTER OF THE SJP FROM THE COALITION. THE PARTY LEADERSHIP WAS ABLE TO PERSUADE THE MP' S, HOWEVER, THAT THE ISSUE WAS NOT IMPORTANT ENOUGH TO CALL FOR THE DISSOLUTION OF PARLIA-

MENT OR FOR THE RESIGNATION OF THE GOVERNMENT.
THE MP'S DECIDED TO LEAVE TO THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE,
WHICH MET THAT SAME EVENING, THE DECISION WHETHER
TO RESHUFFLE THE CABINET.

6. AFTER BITTER DEBATE THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE
DECIDED AGAINST A CABINET RESHUFFLE. THE JUL 31
BANGKOK POST REPORTED THAT DEMOCRAT SPOKESMAN
WIRA MUSIKAPHONG SAID AFTER THE TWO-HOUR MEETING
THAT CIRCUMSTANCES IN THE COUNTRY WERE NOT CONDUCIVE
TO THE DISSOLUTION OF PARLIAMENT OR ANY OTHER EXTREME
MEASURES.

7. AT THE SAME TIME SPOKESMAN WIRA ANNOUNCED
THAT HE AND BANYAT BANTHATTHAN, SECRETARY TO
INTERIOR MINISTER, WERE RESIGNING THEIR GOVERNMENT
POSTS AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE DECISION.
WIRA TOLD THE PRESS ON JUL 31 THAT PRIME MINISTER
SENI PRAMOT HAD RECEIVED THEIR RESIGNATIONS AND
ALSO THEIR RECOMMENDATIONS THAT THAIWAT TRAIYASUNAN,
MP FROM PHETCHABUN AND PARTY DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL
FOR PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS, REPLACE HIM AS GOVERNMENT
HOUSE SPOKESMAN AND AMNUAI SWANKHIRI, MP FROM SONGKHLA,
REPLACE BANYAT AS SECRETARY TO THE INTERIOR MINISTER.
THE AUG 3 PRESS REPORTED THAT SENI WAS URGING
BOTH MEN TO RECONSIDER THEIR RESIGNATIONS.

8. COMMENTS: THIS IS UNDENIABLY A MAJOR DEFEAT
FOR THE DEMOCRATS. THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A MAJOR
POLICY PLANK HAS BEEN TEMPORARILY THWARTED AND THE
DEMOCRATS' ABILITY TO GOVERN CALLED INTO FURTHER QUESTION,
WITH GREAT LOSS OF FACE. THE GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN
SHAKEN, BUT HAS NOT FALLEN NOR WILL IT FALL IN THE
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IMMEDIATE FUTURE. THE EMBASSY HAS NO REASON TO
DKUBT THE PROMISE OF THE LEADERS OF THE THREE COALITION
PARTNERS TO VOTE FOR THE BUDGET BILL. NO ONE
RELISHES ANOTHER ELECTION.

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PM-04 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 CIAE-00

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1680

INFO CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BANGKOK 21995

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

9. THE DEFEAT FURTHER TARNISHED THE ALREADY POOR LEADERSHIP IMAGE OF THE DEMOCRATS (SEE REF A). SENI'S INDECISIVENESS, PUBLIC SQUABBLING AMONG DEMOCRATS, SAMAK SUNTHARAWET'S ATTACK ON THE GOVERNMENT'S FOREIGN POLICY, AND THE GOVERNMENT'S SLOW IMPLEMENTATION OF ITS STATED POLICY, HAVE CALLED INTO QUESTION THE ABILITY OF THE DEMOCRATS TO GOVERN.

10. IN THEIR HASTE TO ACTIVATE THE ACC THE DEMOCRATS PUSHED THROUGH THE NOMINATIONS TOO RAPIDLY AND DID NOT ALLOW FOR ADEQUATE CONSULTATIONS WITH THEIR COALITION PARTNERS. THIS GAVE THEIR PARTNERS AN EXCUSE TO THWART THEIR PLANS. AFTER THE DEFEAT THE ANGRY REACTION OF SOME DEMOCRATS AND THE EMERGENCY MEETING MENTIONED ABOVE FOCUSED FURTHER PUBLIC ATTENTION ON AND MAGNIFIED THE DEMOCRATS' PENCHANT FOR INTERNAL SQUABBLING. THE RESIGNATIONS OF WIRA AND BANYAT ADDED FUEL TO THE FIRE.

11. THE RESIGNATIONS OF WIRA, AND BANYAT WILL EXACERBATE INTERNAL PARTY TENSIONS. ALL ARE OF THE YOUNG, IDEALISTIC, PROGRESSIVE WING OF THE
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DEMOCRATS WHO FELT FIGHTING CORRUPTION WAS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT PLANKS OF THE DEMOCRAT PLATFORM. THEY HAVE BEEN UNHAPPY AT THE INDECISIVENESS OF

MR. SENI AND THE PACE AT WHICH THE SOCIAL REFORM PROGRAMS IN WHICH THEY ARE MOST INTERESTED HAVE BEEN IMPLEMENTED. THEY HAVE NEVER BEEN AT EASE WITH THE LIKES OF THAWIT, MG PRAMAN ADIREKSAN OR PRASIT KANCHANAWAT. IT IS UNLIKELY THAT THESE DEMOCRATS WILL BOLT THE PARTY, HOWEVER, SINCE THEY HAVE NOWHERE ELSE TO GO.

12. THE ONLY BRIGHT SPOT FOR THE DEMOCRATS WAS THAT ALL THE DEMOCRATS WHO WERE PRESENT VOTED WITH THE GOVERNMENT. PERHAPS WE SHOULD NOT DISMISS LIGHTLY OPINIONS OF DEMOCRATS LIKE DR. KAMON SOMWICHIAN, WHO ALSO EXPRESSED TO EMBOFFS RECENTLY HIS CONCERN ABOUT M.R. SENI'S INDECISIVENESS AND EXTREME CAUTION AND THE SLOW PACE AT WHICH GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS WERE BEING FORMULATED AND IMPLEMENTED. AT THE SAME TIME HE SAID THAT REPORTS OF SPLITS WITHIN THE DEMOCRAT PARTY WERE EXAGGERATED; IT IS NORMAL FOR DEMOCRATS TO SQUABBLE PUBLICLY BUT TO VOTE AS ONE ON THE CRUCIAL ISSUES.
WHITEHOUSE

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